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SUBJECT: VATICAN TO CONTINUE EFFORTS ON BANNING HUMAN
EMBRYONIC CLONING DESPITE UN DELAY

REF: A) VATICAN 3359; B) VATICAN 3737

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Holy See Acting Foreign Minister Pietro Parolin expressed disappointment with the UN decision to postpone a vote on competing resolutions that propose bans on human cloning in a November 13 meeting with the Charge. He added, however, that the Vatican was buoyed by the progress that had been made with international opinion on the issue, and would continue its efforts to convince the undecided and opponents of the ban. Earlier in the week, the Pope reaffirmed the Vatican's position on stem cell research -- including his strong opposition to therapeutic cloning -- in an address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. End Summary.

Disappointment with Delay . . .

2.(SBU) In a November 13 meeting with the Charge, Holy See Acting Foreign Minister Pietro Parolin expressed disappointment in the decision of the Legal Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to postpone by two years a vote on a global ban on the practice of reproductive and therapeutic cloning. He reaffirmed the Holy See's determination to continue to work on the issue, agreeing ruefully when the Charge pointed out that scientific developments in cloning would unfortunately move ahead quickly over the next two years in the absence of international action. Parolin said the Vatican had not yet mapped out a specific strategy, but would likely continue working to build support among Islamic countries with whom it had had some success in finding common ground on the issue, as well as among predominantly Catholic countries. He also thanked the U.S. for its efforts to achieve a ban on all human cloning, and promised continued cooperation from the Holy See.

. . . but Satisfaction at Progress

3. (SBU) Parolin emphasized that, the close vote for postponement notwithstanding, the Holy See was buoyed by the progress that had been made internationally on the issue, both among governments and public opinion. (Comment: The Holy See had initially been doubtful that enough countries would come around to support a resolution that would also ban therapeutic cloning, but was spurred to support the complete ban in part by U.S. determination to fight for it. End Comment.) The Holy See's lobbying efforts on behalf of the Costa Rican draft resolution had generated more traction than the Vatican had expected, as more and more countries came out in favor a ban on both reproductive and therapeutic cloning.

Pope Reaffirms Vatican Position

4. (U) Earlier in the week, the Pope reaffirmed the Church's rejection of experimentation on embryonic stem cells (and, by implication, the therapeutic cloning which is often a part of such work) when he received members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in audience on November 10. The scientists were meeting to analyze the scientific and bioethical implications of stem cell technology and other therapies.

5. (U) In his English-language address, John Paul II observed: "Research in this field has understandably grown

in importance in recent years because of the hope it offers for the cure of ills affecting many people." He added: "I have on other occasions stated that stem cells for purposes

of experimentation or treatment cannot come from human embryo tissue. I have instead encouraged research on adult human tissue or tissue superfluous to normal fetal development." Reaffirming his rejection of therapeutic cloning, the Pope stressed: "Any treatment which claims to save human lives, yet is based upon the destruction of human life in its embryonic state, is logically and morally contradictory, as is any production of human embryos for the direct or indirect purpose of experimentation or eventual destruction."

Comment: Holy See to Continue to Press for Ban

16. (SBU) The Holy See will use the time before UNGA's next consideration of the issue vigorously to lobby its moral allies on the issue (both predominantly Catholic countries as well as Islamic nations), and also to continue dialogue with states that are sympathetic to the development of therapeutic cloning. The Holy See remains open to continuing its close collaboration with the U.S. on this issue, and would welcome U.S. perspectives on the way ahead over the next two years in light of the UN vote.

HARDT

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